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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002978

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10 YEARS

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCRM](#) [SNAR](#) [ES](#)

SUBJECT: SALVADOR HOMICIDE RATE CONTINUES OUT OF CONTROL

REF: SAN SALVADOR 02811

Classified By: DCM Michael A. Butler for reasons 1.4(b) & (d)

¶1. (U) Local San Salvador press reported on November 1 that the National Police(PNC) recorded 335 homicides in the month of October 2005. Thus far during the calendar year, 3,115 individuals have been murdered in El Salvador, as violent deaths have increased by thirty-nine percent over 2004. Although two months remain in the calendar year, 2005 is already the most violent year on record since 1999.

¶2. (C) According to PNC Director Ricardo Menesses, only fifty-five percent of murders recorded in October were attributable to gang activity. This statistic debunks claims made by some GOES officials that up to ninety percent of murders result from criminal gang activity. Other GOES officials have opined that a lack of cooperation between the Police and the Attorney General cripples the criminal justice system and permits criminals to go unpunished. (See Reftel).

Even if all violent perpetrators were caught and successfully prosecuted, however, the Salvadoran penitentiary system is overwhelmed and cannot accommodate a significant rise in convicted criminals, which causes many judges to release violent criminals either on bond or on their own recognizance. (See Post's 2005 Human Rights Report).

¶3. (C) COMMENT: As mentioned in Reftel, Plan Super Mano Dura ("Heavy Hand") is widely seen as having had no impact in reducing violent crime, since it has led to numerous arrests of gang members, but few convictions. The Plan also does not address the spiraling number of violent deaths (roughly half in October) resulting from non-gang related activity. Unless and until the police, Attorney General's office, judiciary, and the penal system begin to work more closely together in addressing the violent crime issue, El Salvador's violent crime situation will continue to spiral out of control.
Barclay